

Polling results report: 05 August 2020

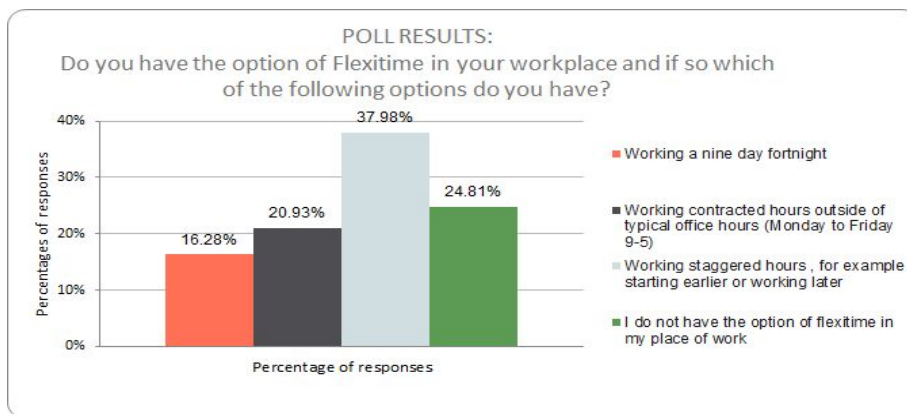
This report

This report covers the period between the 21 July and 3 August 2020. Participants during this period were asked their views on whether their employers offered the option of Flexitime working and also which type of Flexitime they would find the most useful. Participants were also asked the four wellbeing questions provided by the Office of National statistics 94 Social Workers responded to this poll, with some providing qualitative data.

Flexitime in the workplace

Participants were asked whether their employers offered Flexitime options and if they did what they were. Please see results in Fig 1:

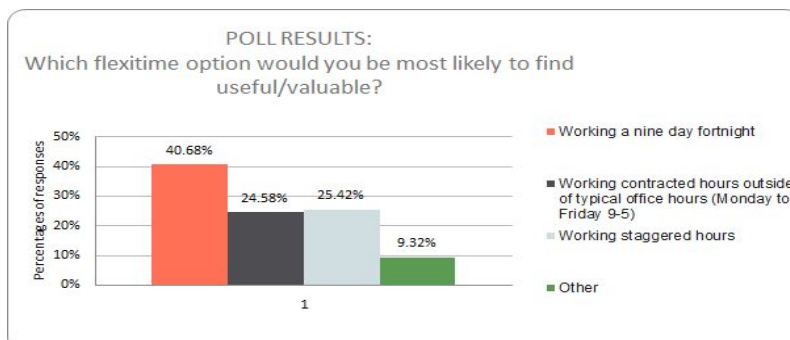
Fig 1



The most popular response was for staggered hours, which is likely to be the easiest option for participants to utilise as it is often common practice in the workplace.

Participants were also asked which option they would find the most useful. Please note that the 'other' column refers to text responses covered later in the report. Please see fig 2 below;

Fig 2





Interestingly, working a nine day fortnight was by far the most preferred option, although the least likely to be offered by employers according to our results. Working staggered hours was the second most popular choice with a substantially lower number of responses. WWCS's Happier Healthier Professionals project will be undertaking a research project looking at Flexitime and evaluating its impact on social workers' wellbeing and sickness absence. Knowledge that the nine day fortnight is a popular option will be useful when talking to partners regarding what intervention options they offer.

“Do you have any other options for flexitime that have not been suggested?”

Ten practitioners commented on Flexitime in the workplace and shed some light on the reasoning behind the different options. Reasons put forward for flexible-working fell within two broad categories: being better able to meet the needs of the service e.g. by enabling evening visits to families, and the second theme is around supporting a work-life balance e.g. by working compressed hours and freeing up some time during the week.

Continuing to work from home

Several practitioners expressed a desire to continue working from home, which has been a recurring theme throughout the polling responses since COVID-19 lockdown measures started. For one practitioner, continuing to work from home is important in the context of Flexitime in the workplace. This is because

“it becomes difficult to arrange meetings if social workers have different times but need joint meetings etc.”

Therefore, providing for meetings to be attended virtually, might make it easier for people to attend.

Enabling evening visits

One practitioner put forward the idea of having one day a week where you can choose to start later and finish later to enable social workers to visit families in the evening:

“once a week starting later and finishing later to do evening visits”.

Enabling social workers to work outside of typical office hours would be a welcome addition since children are usually in education and parents or carers can often be in work during the day.

Compressed hours for free time

Two practitioners suggested working longer days to enable some time off during the week - *“working longer on a couple of days to get an afternoon off”*. Similarly, another practitioner put forward the idea of working ‘compressed hours’ e.g. *“working full hours over four days”*, which would enable one day off per week. In this way, flexitime in the workplace could support a work-life balance for social workers.

Use of professional judgement

For another practitioner, they would like more autonomy over the hours they can work in a given day and they touch upon the use of professional judgement:



“As social workers we are being instructed that we cannot work above 7.5 hours per working day. This rigidity is increasing the stress and pressure that we have to work under and removes our professional judgement”.

Implications for practice

Flexible working could help to achieve a better work-life balance for social workers whilst also meeting the needs of the service e.g. through one’s ability to work outside of typical office hours and conduct evening visits to families. In a context of flexible-working, there still needs to be the option for social workers to claim back time spent working outside of contracted hours; this is important to support both workplace wellbeing and good practice.

Whilst these views are not representative of all children’s social workers in England, the views suggest that social workers share a desire for both greater autonomy regarding working schedules and to continue working from home. Therefore, there should be further consideration into flexible working and remote working for social workers.

Wellbeing results

The table below shows the results for wellbeing over the past two weeks. In each domain of anxiety, life satisfaction, life worthwhile and happiness there has been a slight increase.

Fig 3

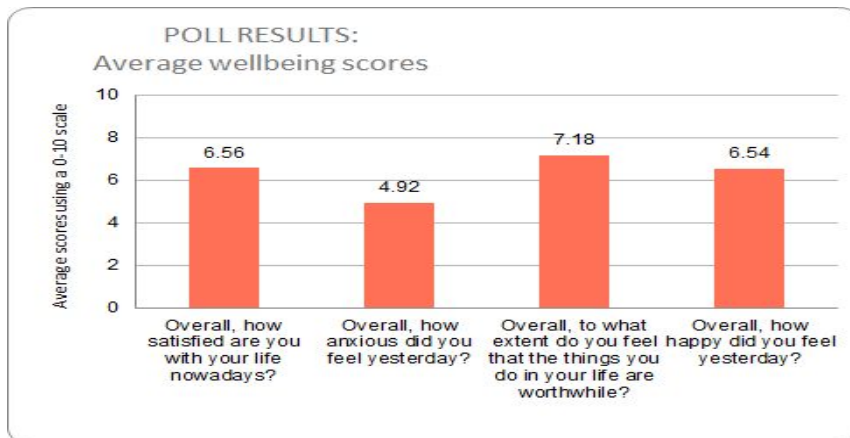


Figure 4 shows the results over the last four months for all four questions on wellbeing.

Fig 4



Levels of anxiety and happiness both increased slightly in this last two week period and were the second highest recorded since the initial lockdown period.

As lockdown eases and restaurants and pubs open, people's wellbeing may be positively impacted by a perception that life is returning to some form of normality. However, at the same time there have been local lockdown measures put in place which may have increased people's anxiety, believing that there may be a second spike.

It is envisaged that ongoing regular collection of wellbeing data will provide a clearer understanding over time of whether changes to working practice due to the pandemic have an influence on perceptions of wellbeing.

About WW-CSC Polling

What Works for Children's Social Care runs regular polls with social workers who have registered with us. Social workers are currently employed in a range of organisations and we canvas their opinions about our current and future research agenda as well as topics impacting on social work practice. There are 820 social workers currently registered to participate.